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PART-TIME FARMING BY NEGROES NEAR LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

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Part-Time Farming by Negroes Near Lexington, Kentucky*

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INTRODUCTION

The data upon which this report is based were obtained in the spring and summer of 1934, covering the year, March 31, 1933, to March 31, 1934, from 104 negroes living on small tracts of land near Lexington, mostly within Fayette County. The study includes families who get part of their living from the land and part from some other occupation; a few unemployed or aged persons who depend upon savings or the assistance of others for their means of livelihood; and farm hands who operate small truck patches and gardens on their small home tracts. A similar study was made of 329 white families. See Bulletin No. 358 of the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station.

THE AREA

The Lexington Area in East Central Kentucky is located in the center of the Bluegrass Region. Lexington, including its suburbs, had a population of about 60,000, in 1930. This city is the most important commercial and service center for counties within a radius of 30 to 75 miles, and is famous as a tobacco market and thorobred horse center. Agriculture is the foundation of the city's prosperity and lack of industries has been the chief factor limiting part-time farming in this area.

Occupations available to the negroes in this area are, largely, domestic service, janitor work, or general unskilled manual labor such as road construction, farming or railroad work. During the depression many domestic servants lost their employment because many white families were no longer financially able to furnish work for them. As a consequence negro families were forced to depend more largely upon home tracts for their subsistence.

*Data for this study were collected and tabulated by technically trained workers furnished by the Kentucky Emergency Relief Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and supervised by staff members of the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station. Credit is due David Clarke, J. W. Durrett, and H. F. Smoot for field work in collecting the schedules, and to Eugene Cravens and Albert Isham who aided in tabulating the data. The authors are indebted to Kenneth Hood of the New York State College of Agriculture whose published report of a similar study in New York furnished valuable suggestions on field schedules and methods of analysis.

THE PART-TIME FARMERS

These 104 part-time farm operators ranged in age from 26 to 88 years. About one-half of them were between the ages of 35 and 55 and one-third were over 50 years of age. Of the latter group, two were retired and two disabled. One of the operators had had no farming experience, eight had operated full-time farms and ninety-five had operated part-time farms prior to the year of study.

Four-fifths of these operators earned their outside income as unskilled laborers. Most of them worked on nearby farms or as railroad section hands and street or highway laborers. Of the three skilled laborers one was a paper hanger and two were stone masons. Of the six who were in business or a profession, three were storekeepers, two were ministers and one was a teacher. Most of them had quite low incomes from outside services.

Twenty-five percent of these operators had never attended school. Forty percent had attended school but had not passed the sixth grade. Twenty-seven percent had between a sixth and eighth grade education and eight percent had continued beyond the eighth grade. Included in the latter group were the two who had attended college.

OPERATION OF THE TRACTS

The land operated by these part-time farmers was, for the most part, of about average fertility for the county, but the tracts were usually small. One-third of them were one-fourth acre or less and one-fifth contained one-half acre each. The average tract contained 2.9 acres. Only six tracts were over 15 acres, the largest being 30 acres. The operators had an average of 1.8 acres in crops, or about two-thirds of the total acreage. However, three-fourths of these operators had less than .6 acres in crops and only 10 percent of them had more than 5 acres in crops.

These operators worked 1.8 months per year, or an average of 1.1 hours per day, on their home tracts. The amount of time varied from 1.5 hours per day in winter to 3 hours per day in summer and from no work at all by some to nearly full-time by other operators. On those tracts where the operator did no farm work, such work was done by other members of the family. In this study a farm day is considered seven and one-half hours and a month, thirty days.

The agricultural investment, which includes real estate, livestock and farming equipment, exceeded $2,000 on only 5 of the

78 owner-operated farms. The investment was less than $1,000 on 60 of them. The investment in livestock and implements averaged $22 for the 26 renters and $37 for the 78 owners of part-time farms. The implements reported by the 26 renters averaged only $1.

The owner-operators averaged a farm mortgage debt of $36, other farm debts of 25 cents and non-farm debts of $35. For the 13 owners who had farm mortgages the average was $217, and for the 34 owners who had non-farm debts the average was $79. The one renter who had a farm debt owed $70 for rent. For the 15 renters who had non-farm debts the average was $57.

The investment in work animals averaged $13 per farm with an

TABLE 1. Analysis of Income of 104 Negro Part-Time Farmers, Grouped by Size of Operator's Outside Income.

Items	All farms		Group 1 39 farms	Group 2 37 farms	Group 3 21 farms	Group 4 7 farms
	Average	Percent	Less than $125	$125 to $249	$250 to $499	$500 and over
Farm receipts:						
Farm crops ..... $	56	14.2	$107	$ 28	$ 14	$ 51
Livestock products	4	.9	5	3	2	15
Liviestock increase	4	1.0	2	5	2	4
Boarders and roomers....	1	.3	3	–	1	–
Total receipts	65	16.4	117	36	19	70
Privileges:						
Food furnished by farm for home use,						
Fruits and vegetables....	18	4.4	19	16	15	21
Meat, milk, eggs, etc.....	44	11.1	42	39	48	78
Total food furnished	62	15.5	61	55	63	99
Rental value of dwelling	68	17.1	74	60	73	63
Total privileges	130	32.6	135	115	136	162
Outside income:						
Operator's work off farm	192	48.1	47	153	368	678
Direct and work relief..	12	2.9	12	16	4	–
Total outside income	204	51.0	59	169	372	678
Total income	399	100.0	311	320	527	910

average of one animal to four farms. This investment in work animals was nearly one-half the livestock investment. The 89 farms reporting chickens averaged 13 per farm; the 29 reporting cows averaged 1.4 per farm, and the 14 reporting brood sows averaged 1.5 per farm. Thirty-two of these operators kept only poultry while 10 families kept no livestock during the year.

Three-fifths of the farmers had small families with an adult-male unit[1] of less than 3. These small families had smaller farms,

TABLE 2. Analysis of Expenses of 104 Negro–Operated Part–Time Farms, Grouped by Operator's Outside Income.

Items	All farms		Group 1 39 farms	Group 2 37 farms	Group 3 21 farms	Group 4 7 farms
	Average	Percent	Less than $125	$125 to $249	$250 to $499	$500 and over
Farm expenses:						
Cash expense ..... $	55	64.5	$ 54	$ 47	$ 57	$ 89
Unpaid family labor.....	17	20.1	32	7	10	12
Livestock decrease	4	4.4	2	4	5	4
Depreciation on real estate	9	10.9	11	6	12	8
Depreciation on machinery	*	.1	–	–	–	–
Total expenses	85	100.0	99	64	84	113

* Less than 50 cents.

smaller gardens, and used less unpaid family labor than the larger families.

Income. The total income of the part-time farmers averaged $399, of which approximately one-half was obtained from work done off the farm (Table 1). Farm receipts comprised only $65, or one-sixth of the total income, while farm privileges or perquisites amounted to $130, or one-third of the total income. It is evident, therefore, that the cash income of these part-time farmers is derived mainly from their outside employment.

Farm expenses. Cash expenses averaged $55, or two-thirds of the total expenses (Table 2). These cash expenses included such items as hired labor, repair of dwellings, feed, insurance, taxes, rent and numerous other small items chargeable to the farm business. Family living expenses were not included. Unpaid family labor[2] averaged $17 for the group. Since there was more unpaid labor on some tracts than on others, this item was charged as an expense in order that all farms might be comparable.

Operator's net earnings from the farm. Farm receipts plus value of privileges less farm expenses, averaged $111 per part-time tract

1 Since there was a wide difference in the age and number of children in different families, each family was reduced to an "adult-male unit" basis, each unit requiring the amount of food necessary for a moderately active male in good health between 18 and 60 years of age. The operator, his wife, and all other persons in the household were considered moderately active. In arriving at the adult-male unit figure, the method used was that of Dr. Edith Hawley, reported as the energy scale in Technical Bul. No. 8, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

2 This includes unpaid labor of all persons other than the operator.

(Table 4). Interest at 5 percent on the capital invested, including the dwelling, averaged $30. The difference between these two amounts, $81, can be considered the operator's net earnings from the tract for the year. The average operator earned an outside income[3] of $204 which, with the $81 net earnings from the tract, made a total operator's labor earnings of $285.

THE FARM BUSINESS IN RELATION TO AMOUNT OF OUTSIDE INCOME

Outside income was used as a basis for grouping the farms for an analysis of the farm business, since income from sources off the tract exceeded other types of income for these part-time farmers. The outside income of these operators ranged from $2 to $800 and averaged $204. Over one-third of the 104 families had an outside income less than $125 and only seven families had an outside income exceeding $500 (Table 1).

Farm receipts. Farm receipts were low for all the groups but were largest for the group with the lowest outside income. Persons in that group had to depend upon their home tracts almost entirely for their living. Farm receipts ranged from nothing on 50 tracts to $884 on one tract. The 50 tracts that had no farm receipts were distributed among the four outside-income groups as follows: 15 in the group less than $125, 22 in the $125 to $249 group, 10 in the $250 to $499 group and 3 in the group with an outside income of $500 or over. Tobacco was the chief crop and constituted the largest item of farm receipts. This item caused most of the variation in farm receipts among individual farms and different outside-income groups.

Farm privileges. The value of food for home use furnished by the farm was highest for the group with an outside income of $500 or over (Table 1). The variation among the other three groups was slight. For three outside-income groups the value of food furnished by the farm, altho less than $100, exceeded farm receipts. Garden products showed little variation for the different outside-income groups and amounted to almost one-third the food for home use and to approximately one-half the value of livestock products, chiefly milk and eggs.

The value of the dwelling was usually the most important privi-

3 It will be noted in Table 1 that receipts from charity, relief agencies, old age or other pensions and insurance compensations are included in outside income.

lege furnished by the tract and averaged about the same for the four groups. The value of the use of dwellings on tracts owned by the operators was accepted at the estimated figure necessary to rent a dwelling of similar quality in a similar locality. For rented tracts an allocation of the total rental figure was made between the dwelling and the remainder of the property. Often this annual rental value amounted to a third or even greater proportion of the total value of the dwelling.

Farm expenses. The group of operators who had outside incomes of $125 to $249 had the lowest cash expenses, the lowest un-

TABLE 3. Analysis of Expenses of Part–Time Operators, Owners and Renters, Including and Excluding Cost Items on Their Dwellings. All Farms.

	Including cost items on operator's dwellings		Excluding cost items on operator's dwellings	
	78 Owners	26 Renters	78 Owners	26 Renters
Operator's earnings from farm..	–	–	$ 89	$ 56
Capital expenses:				
Repairs	$ 10	$ *	1	*
Insurance	2	–	*	–
Taxes	6	–	2	*
Depreciation	12	–	2	–
Interest on investment	40	1	16	1
Cash rent	*	58	1	6
Total capital expenses....	70	$ 59	$ 22	$ 7
Operating expenses:				
Unpaid family labor	19	10	19	10
Board of hired labor	—	—	—	—
Hired labor	7	8	7	8
Feed—roughage	4	2	4	2
Grain	10	8	10	8
Seeds, plants, trees, etc.	3	2	3	2
Other expenses	8	5	8	5
Total operating exp'es	$ 51	$ 35	$ 51	$ 35
Total expenses	$ 121	$ 94	$ 73	$ 42

* Less than 50 cents.

paid family labor, the lowest depreciation on real estate and the lowest total expenses. The renters usually operated less valuable property than the owners and had lower capital expenses (Table 3). However, depreciation and interest on investment, neither of which represents cash outlay, comprised three-fourths of the total capital expenses of the owners. Operating expenses, chiefly unpaid family labor, hired labor, feed and seed costs usually were higher on the owned than on the rented farms.

Operator's earnings from the tracts. The group with an outside income less than $125, had the largest receipts from their tracts and the largest operator's net earnings of any outside income groups (Table 4). The $250 to $499 outside-income group had the lowest farm receipts and the lowest operator's net earnings. Except the highest outside-income group which contained only seven farms, operator's farm earnings decreased as outside income increased. Only 20 of the operators had negative operator's earnings, the lowest being a loss of $61.

TABLE 4. Analysis of Operator's Labor Earnings on 104 Negro-Operated Part-Time Farms by Operator's Outside Income.

Items	All farms	Group 1 Less than $125	Group 2 $125 to $249	Group 3 $250 to $499	Group 4 $500 and over
Farm receipts plus value of privileges (Table 1)	196	252	151	155	232
Farm expenses (Table 2)	85	98	64	85	113
Operator's farm income plus privileges	111	154	87	70	119
Interest on investment at 5%	30	35	24	34	23
Operator's net earnings from farm	81	119	63	36	96
Outside income (Table 1)	204	59	172	372	678
Operator's labor earnings	285	178	235	408	774

Reasons for becoming part-time farmers. The very low outside incomes of most of these operators induced them to undertake part-time farming for economic reasons. The chief reasons given were, to escape unemployment in the city, to obtain lower rent, to reduce food expenditures by growing a garden or to become independent in old age. Many of them gave love of country life as a supplementary reason. Of the eighteen operators who had always lived in the country, a majority became part-time farmers because they were unemployed or sought independence in old age. Part-time farming for them was an attempt to fortify against an entire loss of income and resulting financial dependence.

Farm work. Farmers who had an outside income under $125 averaged more months of farm work per year and more hours of farm work per day on the home tract than those of any other group (Table 5). They also had higher farm earnings and worked fewer days off the home tract than the others.

Relief. Sixty-six of these families received relief in some form

averaging $21 per family. Thirty-eight families received relief only in the form of garden seed and plants averaging $2.70 per family. The largest proportions of relief families and families receiving the largest amounts of relief were in the lower outside-income

TABLE 5. Amount of Time Operator Worked on and off Home Tract, Grouped by Operator's Outside Income Groups.

Items	Group 1 Less than $125	Group 2 $125 to $249	Group 3 $250 to $499	Group 4 $500 and over
Number of farms	39	37	21	7
Days worked off farm	52.2	140.2	299.4	286.1
Average outside income $	59.00	$172.00	$372.00	$678.00
Average pay per day	1.13	1.23	1.24	2.36
Months worked on farm	2.4	1.4	1.5	1.4
Hours worked daily on farm (spring)	1.9	1.2	1.2	1.1
" " " " " (summer)	1.9	1.2	1.2	1.2
" " " " " (fall)	1.6	1.0	1.1	.9
" " " " " (winter)	.6	.1	.3	.4

groups. Relief was one of the items of outside income but only three persons received their entire outside income from that source. The value of food furnished by the tract had a slight effect upon the amount of relief received if the food exceeded $25 in value. Families having food valued at less than $100 furnished by the tract, received relief averaging $22, while families having food valued at more than $100 furnished by the tract, obtained an average of $16 relief per family. However, the proportion of persons on relief was less in the latter group.

THE FARM BUSINESS IN RELATION TO THE OPERATOR'S NET EARNINGS FROM THE FARM

Nearly one-half the operators had net earnings of $0 to $49 each. The tracts in this group had the lowest value of food furnished by the farm, the lowest farm receipts, and the lowest farm expenses. In this analysis of the farm business the value of the use of the dwelling and the dwelling expenses, i. e., repairs, taxes, insurance and interest on the house investment, have been omitted in order to permit a study of the contribution of the tract itself to the operator's net earnings from the tract.

Farm receipts. Farm earnings showed a close relation to cash farm receipts. Seventy-eight of the tract operators had cash farm receipts under $20. Fifty had no cash receipts but averaged $17 net

farm earnings, perquisites being the only contribution made by the tract. Sales of tobacco and cream were the only significant items of cash receipts. The operators having net earnings of $300 and over operated the largest number of acres, kept the largest number of poultry, and had the largest investment in cattle.

Livestock. It was characteristic of the more profitable tracts that they had more cows and poultry than the less profitable ones. The type of livestock appeared to be as important as the amount in determining net farm earnings. Generally farm earnings decreased when hogs were kept but increased with the number of cows and chickens. The number of chickens per tract was quite low for all operators and it seems that, if the number were increased, an increase in farm earnings might result. Farmers having one cow averaged nearly $75 more net farm earnings than those having no cow. Most of these tracts were too small for efficient marketing of dairy products.

Perquisites. Food furnished from the tract ranged in value from $3 to $234 per tract, with no significant difference between owned and rented tracts. Operator's net earnings from the tract and operator's labor earnings showed a rather direct relation to value of farm products used in the home. The tracts with food products ranging from $151 to $225 had net farm earnings four times as large as did those with food products valued at $75 or less. Livestock products, chiefly milk and eggs, were the most important food privileges and showed the widest variation for the different operator's net earnings groups.

For the $0 to $49, $50 to $99, and $100 to $199 farm earnings groups the value of food furnished from the tract was larger than farm expenses, excluding those on the dwelling. This left at least the cash receipts as net farm earnings for those groups.

Farm expenses. These operators had very low farm expenses. Cash expenses amounted to two-thirds of the total and, when combined with unpaid labor and depreciation on real estate, made up nearly all the total expenses. The two highest net-earnings groups had high expenses but their tracts contained more acres than those of the other groups and had a much larger business as shown by the cash receipts. In the two highest net farm-earnings groups, hired labor was the largest item of cash expense, and was largely responsible for the high expenses in those groups. Unpaid labor was the

chief non-cash item and varied considerably for the different groups. Interest on investment showed little change except for the group having the highest operator's net farm earnings.

TABLE 6. Value of Food Products Furnished by the Home Tract in Relation to Operator's Net Earnings from Home Tract.

Items	All farms	Operator's Net Earnings from Tract					
		Group 1 -1 and over	Group 2 $ 0 to $49	Group 3 $50 to $99	Group 4 $100 to $199	Group 5 $200 to $299	Group 6 $300 and over
Number of tracts	104	20	46	12	17	9	6
Food furnished by tract:							
Vegetables	17	16	13	18	18	19	35
Fruits	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
Total	18	18	14	21	19	20	37
Livestock products:							
Meat	16	8	15	22	26	18	24
Milk	16	7	3	14	46	54	30
Eggs	9	5	6	7	13	12	25
Other	3	3	1	3	15	10	3
Total	44	23	25	46	100	94	82
Total food furnished	62	41	39	67	119	114	119

DISTANCE FROM NON-FARMING EMPLOYMENT

In selecting a part-time farm, its location relative to the operator's job off the farm is an important consideration. This importance increases with steadiness of outside employment. If the farm is to contribute the major portion of the operator's earnings, its location for economic production is more important than proximity to outside employment. Three-fifths of these part-time operators, altho employed off their tracts, had no transportation costs. The majority of them were laborers or croppers on neighboring farms or railroad section laborers. Most of them walked to work, one as far as five miles. Three persons rode horses to work while five were provided with transportation by their employers.

Of those within five miles of their work only twelve had transportation costs, the average being 12 cents per day. Those who lived more than 5 miles from their work paid commuting costs averaging 35 cents per day. If they worked as many as 24 days per month, they could afford to pay $8 more rent per month for a similar house within walking distance of their work. However,

most of them did not have steady employment. These families therefore, had the advantage of residing in the country, producing part of the family living, and having transportation costs only when employed off the home tract.

TABLE 7. Relation between Miles to Work and Transportation Costs per Day.

	Miles to work	Number of Operators	Days of outside work	Transpo-ta-tion costs (cents per day)
Ill, aged or unemployed	–	7	–	–
No transportation cost	–	61	159	–
Transportation not available	–	13	174	–
Less than 1 mile	.5	1	312	3
1.0 to 4.9	2.8	11	163	13
5.0 to 8.9	4.7	5	176	35
9.0 or more	10.8	6	121	34½
All operators	5.2*	104	161**	23*

* Average fo- 23 farmers having transportation costs.
** Average for 97 farmers having outside employment.

These part-time operators had low automobile operation costs per mile because their cars were old and depreciation charges were low. Cost of operation per mile did not differ noticeably for the low- and medium-priced cars. This was chiefly due to age and lack of depreciation of the cars and to disregard for minor defects so long as the cars would run. The part-time operators had about the same car costs regardless of the type of road on which they lived. However, the car owners living on dirt roads were so near improved roads that most of their driving was done on hard-surfaced roads.

SELECTION OF THE PART-TIME TRACTS

Because part-time farmers are interested in the production of truck and garden crops which require a fertile soil for best results, it is highly important that they locate on soils of reasonable fertility. The smaller the non-farm income of the prospective part-time farmer and the greater his need for food and cash receipts from the farm the more importance he should attach to the quality of the land. The prospective part-time farmer should locate as near his outside employment as possible. He should select a tract near the urban center if he expects to work as an urban laborer, or near full-time farms if he intends to earn his outside income as a farm hand. Location on an all-weather road is important if he is to use his car thruout the year.

The desirable size of a part-time farm depends upon the size of the family and amount of outside employment. Large families need more land than small families for the production of home-grown food and for the profitable employment of otherwise idle family labor.

SUMMARY

Many negroes have insufficient funds to operate a full-time farm and have undertaken part-time farming either from necessity or because of a desire for a more independent life. Hard-surfaced roads and privately owned automobiles had little effect upon the number of part-time farmers because few of them owned automobiles. The part-time operators in this study lived on small tracts and attempted to supplement their outside incomes by products from the farm. Ninety-nine percent of the 104 operators in this study had had farming experience prior to the year of study. Eighty-eight percent of them earned their outside incomes as unskilled laborers. Twenty-three percent of them had had no schooling, while 42 percent had completed from one to five grades and only 6 percent had attended high school.

The average size of the tracts was 2.9 acres. Seventy-eight of the 104 tracts were less than 2.5 acres in size. The total investment for the seventy-eight tracts averaged nearly $800. One-sixth of the owners had mortgages on their tracts averaging one-fourth of their value. The average investment in livestock and machinery was $22 for the 26 renters and $37 for the 78 owners. Cows were kept by 29 percent of the operators and chickens by 89 percent. Brood sows were kept by 13 percent of the operators and in addition 35 percent purchased hogs for home butchering.

The total income of the 104 part-time operators averaged $399, of which $192, or 48 percent, was obtained from work done off the tracts. Farm receipts were 14 percent, food furnished from the tract 16 percent, and the value of the use of the dwelling was 17 percent of the total income.

After expenses, including unpaid family labor and interest on investment, were deducted, the average earnings of the operator were $81. These earnings plus $204 outside income resulted in total labor earnings of $285 per operator.

The amount of food for home use furnished from the tract showed little variation among the different outside-income groups

and averaged about the same as the value of agricultural products sold from these tracts. Three-fourths of the total receipts from crops went to the 39 families having outside incomes of less than $125.

The advantage of part-time farming appears to be in reduced food and living costs rather than in increased cash earnings. The security offered during periods of unemployment was shown to be an important factor in attracting families whose employment was seasonal or whose positions were insecure.

Contrary to popular opinion, that part-time farming does not appeal to families of small size, three-fifths of these families consisted chiefly of young couples with few children or of retired families whose children had left home. These small families had smaller gardens but they had more than an average amount of livestock.

Most of the 104 operators gave economic reasons for living on part-time tracts, such as lower housing costs, opportunity for growing vegetables for home use, and provision for old age. Only a few included love of country life as a reason.

The production of three important kinds of food for home consumption — vegetables, dairy products and poultry products — was the chief economic reason for living on a part-time farming tract. The average family obtained more financial benefit from a cow than from a garden or poultry flock. However, many families were unable to keep a cow because of small acreage.

Sixty-one of these operators had no transportation costs. Twelve of the 23 who incurred costs for transportation lived less than five miles from their work. Six operators lived more than nine miles from their work and paid an average of 35 cents per day for transportation.

The experience of these farmers indicates that many persons who undertake part-time farming with the hope of financial gain are likely to be disappointed. The chance to reduce the cost of living appears to be the chief advantage to be gained by living on a part-time farm. Cheaper food and housing make the part-time farm most attractive to large families with small incomes because such families spend a large share of their income for food and rent; besides, the children can help with the farm work and get recreation in the open country rather than in city streets.